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*The House of Mirth*

In *The House of Mirth* by Edith Wharton, Lily Bart uses her beauty and charm in attempt to find a suitable wealthy husband to support her lavish lifestyle. Lily Bart sees the importance of beauty and charm in order to capture wealth. Lily Bart grew up accustomed to luxury life and as she said “the only climate she could breathe in”. (23) She could not live in poverty or “live like a pig”. (29) Lily had wanted to marry for love for “she would not indeed have cared to marry a man who was merely rich” but without money, she could never have accept love alone for she would lose her lifestyle. (31) Lily Bart stated “I must have a great deal of money” for she knows she is poor and “very expensive” with “marriage as her only vocation”. (8, 9) Lily Bart represented the individual ladies during the 20th century ladies must marry before reaching a certain age. Without marriage, the women would be subjected to gossips and disapproval by the higher class of society. If young ladies want to be accepted by society, they must marry a reputable family. I believe there is a close relationship between wealth and marriage since Lily Bart could not live without either. I argued that Edith Wharton emphasized the importance of wealth as a necessary part of marriage and in relationship to one’s status in society; using beauty and charm to achieve a wealthy marriage.

In order to capture the perfect rich husband, it requires planning and perfect appearances showing good womanly habits. In order to capture the husband, Lily Bart said she had “to calculate and contrive, and retreat and advance...where one misstep would throw me hopelessly out of time”. (42) Where men can easily get a girl, girls have to calculate their steps in order to capture the right man. Edith Wharton depicted marriage is a battlefield of women fighting for man’s attention. When Lily Bart found Percy Gryce on the train to Bellomont, she “tranquilly studying her prey...while she organised a method of attack”. (15) Lily Bart uses her beauty and charm through many organized actions to capture the attention of young Percy Gryce. Lily Bart must hide behind a mask where she would be depicted as an innocent lady. She must “lock up” her cigarettes, not smoking in front of Percy Gryce, and stop playing bridge for Percy Gryce was too innocent to understand them. (40) Some ladies even to this day still hide behind masks when in the presence of men to be seemed more vulnerable.

Beauty and charm are tools Lily Bart uses to capture attentions and get what she wants. Lily Bart sees “her beauty as a power for good…” Lily Bart uses her beauty for the good of finding a husband to care for her financially. Beauty is a power used by both male and female to get what they want. Beauty is the most important asset of Lily Bart to trap the husband she wants. Without beauty, Lily Bart would not have any chance at finding a wealthy husband. To match with beauty, beautiful clothes are important accessories. “The clothes are the background, the frame...we are expected to be pretty and well-dress…” (11) Lily Bart had already spent money to make herself presentable to society to find a suitable wealthy husband. With the right clothing and beauty, Lily Bart would be able to capture a wealthy husband so she can continue living the lavish lifestyle she had before. With a reputable marriage, Lily Bart would then be accepted by the higher class of the society free from rumors.

Open-ended question: Is wealth really that important in one’s life? Without wealth, would marriages be unhappy or unsatisfied?